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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0127
INFO RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 1540
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 000046

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WHITE HOUSE FOR SPENCER GEISSINGER AND MELISSA BENNETT
NSC FOR MARY HAINES
STATE FOR A/EX/PTS CSZYMANSKI AND AF/W DBANKS
ACCRA FOR WHITE HOUSE PRE-ADVANCE SURVEY TEAM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2018
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [BUSH](#) [GEORGE](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [KMCA](#) [BN](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE POTUS VISIT TO BENIN

REF: A. COTONOU 37
[1B.](#) COTONOU 9

Classified By: Amb. Gayleatha B. Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1.(SBU) The POTUS visit to Benin provides an excellent opportunity to re-enforce already strong ties between the U.S. and Benin and show that the United States supports Benin's democratic tradition. President Yayi, who has followed a decidedly pro-American course since taking office in April 2006, warmly welcomes your visit. The United States is an active partner in Benin's development through USAID, MCC, and Peace Corps. Post suggests that we encourage President Yayi to look to the U.S. as a trading partner, work quickly to implement the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), encourage him to commit to a comprehensive anti-corruption plan, and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the preferred New Embassy Construction (NEC) site in Cotonou. Per ref A, expect President Yayi to raise with POTUS a request for another five year Millennium Challenge Compact after the conclusion of the current compact, assistance in the fight against HIV/AIDS, increased funding for education assistance programs, and a re-inforcement of Benin's capacity to fight against terrorism.

Where is Benin going?

2.(U) President Yayi's political movement, Force Cowrie for an Emerging Benin (FCBE), did well in parliamentary elections in April 2007 and President Yayi now governs with a comfortable majority in the National Assembly. Upcoming municipal elections, which are scheduled for February 17 but will probably be delayed until late March due to delays in naming the electoral commission, will provide an idea of how powerful Yayi and his political movement are after almost 2 years in office. The electoral commission is scheduled to be sworn in January 19 by the President of the Constitutional Court.

3.(U) President Yayi employs a governing style which is much more in touch with the people of Benin than previous presidents. He travels frequently throughout Benin meeting with people in markets and visiting children in school. This translates into his engagement with the international community. President Yayi has traveled extensively in

Europe, South and North America, the Middle East, and Asia in an effort to promote Benin. This international engagement is also present in Benin's peacekeeping efforts. More than 10 percent of Benin's armed forces are deployed abroad on peacekeeping assignments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Haiti.

4.(SBU) President Yayi, who speaks often of an "emerging Benin", prioritized double-digit economic growth and the fight against corruption since taking office. According to the IMF, Benin's GDP grew at 4.2 percent in 2007, up from 3.8 percent in 2006. Economic growth continues to be constrained by electricity shortages and excessive regulatory red tape. The fight against corruption has succeeded in exposing cases of malfeasance at government-owned corporations and in government agencies, but it lacks the overall focus and coordination that an anti-corruption action plan would give it.

How is the United States helping?

5.(U) The United States supports Benin through a wide range of programs including the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Departments of State and Defense, and the Peace Corps. The MCC, which represents the major source of U.S. assistance to Benin, signed its 307 million dollar compact with Benin in 2006. The compact's largest program is its Access to Markets component which aims to use approximately 169 million dollars to vastly improve the efficiency of the Port of Cotonou.

6.(U) The USAID program in Benin is investing in the health and education of the Beninese people with a projected FY 2008 budget of 28.4 million dollars. The Presidential Malaria Initiative (PMI), with an FY 2008 budget of 14 million dollars, will reduce malaria-related deaths by 50 percent over three years. The Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative (WJEI), with a budget of 5.5 million dollars over three years, will act to reduce gender-based violence against women and children.

7.(U) Peace Corps, which will celebrate its 40th anniversary in Benin in 2008, is active in the small business, environment, education, and health sectors. Peace Corps' 93 volunteers, spread throughout Benin, enjoyed considerable success during 2007. Among their many achievements they taught English to 7,586 secondary school students and provided HIV/AIDS education to 3,300 men, women, and youth. Volunteers have also been successful in raising over 50,000 dollars in private-public funding for secondary projects in such areas as orphanage improvement, eco-tourism, and girls' education scholarships.

8.(U) The Department of State, through the ACOTA program, funded the training of 1100 Beninese soldiers for peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cote d'Ivoire during 2007. IMET funding supported a Department of Defense Institute for International Legal Studies seminar which concentrated on the legal aspects of combating terrorism for an engaged audience of 33 senior GOB military and civilian leaders. Self-Help Program Funds funded the construction of multiple classroom buildings across Benin in 2007 and the Democracy and Human Rights Fund supported projects which made an appreciable impact on raising awareness of children's rights and supporting girls' education.

Next Steps in U.S.-Benin Cooperation

9.(C) As we continue to strengthen the ties between the U.S. and Benin, Post requests that President Bush express appreciation for the selection of a U.S. corporation, Combustion Associates, Inc., of California, to build a 80 MW

power plant (Benin's largest ever power plant procurement worth 67 million dollars).

10.(C) NEC: President Yayi's personal support was required to identify a suitable site in Cotonou for a New Embassy Compound (NEC). However, recalcitrant GOB members object to the proposed sale of government land, which includes old, dilapidated Conseil de l'Entente buildings, and have stalled signing an MOU with the USG. It would be useful for POTUS to request President Yayi's continued attention to this matter.

11.(C) Benin deserves our congratulations for its well-organized, responsible and humane response to the avian influenza outbreak, which began in Benin in December 2007. The GOB acted quickly to cooperate with the international community, compensate farmers for their losses, and aggressively cull birds to contain the outbreak. Post now aims to make the PMI a similar success story. It would be useful to re-iterate with President Yayi that the GOB will need to quickly mobilize the necessary resources to support the PMI, manage the resources the U.S. provides transparently and with accountability, and make administrative decisions without delay.

12.(C) President Yayi has taken significant symbolic steps against corruption. He has fired corrupt senior officials, declared an anti-corruption day, lead a march against corruption of several thousand people through Cotonou and created new government audit bodies to monitor government spending. In spite of these efforts, Benin failed the MCC's Corruption indicator in 2006 and 2007, which jeopardizes Benin's continuing eligibility for MCC assistance. Benin must adopt a systemic approach to fighting corruption. We welcome President Yayi's efforts to date to fight corruption and encourage him to work with the international community to quickly develop an anti-corruption action plan.

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